

232 E~MILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND
KEFOKMER

land among his children before his death, whence slow and abominable martyrdom will ensue, a perfect tragedy setting some sixty characters, an entire village of La Beauce, in motion; without counting a secondary plot, the *passionnel* side of the story, a quarrel between two sisters, separated "by the advent of a man, still and ever in connection with a question of land. To sum up, I wish to do for the peasant what I did in *L'Assommoir" for the Paris workman, that is, recount his history, manners, passions, and sufferings, such as environment and circumstances have fatally made them."

In the spring of 1886 Zola started on a tour of investigation. He already had some personal knowledge of the region where he proposed to lay the scene of his story, having gone there in his mother's time, but that was long before he thought of writing "La Terre." Among the places he now visited was Chateaudun, where one finds him early in May, whence he writes a friend an interesting letter which Mr. Sherard prints, and a portion of which one may venture to quote here:

"I have been here [Chateaudun] since yesterday, and have found the spot I need. It is a little valley, four leagues hence, in the canton of Cloyes, between Le Perche and La Beauce, and on the confines of the latter. I shall introduce a little brook into it, which will flow into the Loir — such a brook, by the way, exists. I shall there have all I require—large farms

and small, a central spot, thoroughly French, a typical and very characteristic horizon, gay people speaking *patois* — in short what I always hoped for. . . . I shall return to Cloyes to-morrow and shall go thence to visit my valley and my bit of Beauce frontier in detail. For the day after to-morrow I have an appointment with a farmer living three leagues from here, in La Beauce, and shall visit his farm in detail. . . . I remained to-day at Chateaudun to attend a big cattle-market."*

¹ Sherard, 7. c., p. 227.